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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Statement submitted by Oxfam International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of the Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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About Oxfam GB

Oxfam's mission is to work with others to overcome poverty and suffering. We work in more than 75 countries worldwide. Our activities include advocacy, education, campaigning, and development and humanitarian programmes. We focus on five key aims: sustainable livelihoods; quality education and health care; protection from disasters and violence; right to be heard; and right to equity (gender and diversity).[i]

An emerging focus on men's role in promoting gender equality

Oxfam's commitment to gender equality is rooted in twenty years of analysis and practical action in line with feminist goals. Our understanding of gender mainstreaming has been to focus on programmes whose immediate beneficiaries are women and their dependents, based on continuing evidence that women are the majority in the most economically needy groups in almost all societies, and that women's experience of poverty consists not only of economic want but of social and political exclusion. This is culturally condoned in the vast majority of countries throughout the world.

Our 'Policy on Gender Equality' (2003) reasserts that the vast majority of women have less recourse than men to legal recognition and protection; lower access to public knowledge and information; less decision-making power both within and outside the home; little control over fertility, sexuality and marital choices. However analysis of the obstacles to gender mainstreaming has led Oxfam (and other organisations), in the last two-three years, to acknowledge that addressing men is an essential element of efforts to build gender equality; our policy therefore highlights that any work with men and men's groups will be to this end.

Exploring work with men — Oxfam's Gender Equality and Men (GEM) project

The Gender Equality and Men (GEM) project started in 2002 as an initiative by its UK Poverty Programme and its Middle East, Eastern Europe and CIS (MEEECIS) region, with funding from Oxfam and the UK Department for International Development. The project has been assisting Oxfam to explore how it can advance gender equality and poverty reduction by incorporating men and boys more fully in the organisation's gender work. The project has supported activities such as:

- regional workshops on men and masculinities in the UK, East Asia and South Africa;
- an internal course ("the Gender Journey") that has trained a number of key male advocates of gender equality in our organisation;
- piloting new approaches to work with men in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Albania, and the Negev Desert (Israel);
- policy and practice change at different levels of government (Yemen and the UK[ii]).

The current phase of GEM entails the publication of an Oxfam book *('Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice')* in June 2004. This edited collection builds on previous publications from Oxfam GB[iii], bringing together contributions

from fourteen development practitioners and researchers working in many parts of the world who are seeking to promote gender equality among men. In our comments below we draw upon the preliminary conclusions of the book.

The added value of including men in gender equality strategies

Oxfam recognises there is a risk that efforts to involve men in gender equality strategies may divert attention and funding from programmes that support women. Work with men may be seen as an attempt to co-opt existing gender work to support rather than challenge existing inequality. And resistance among men themselves can be hard to overcome. However, there may be risks if men are *not* involved. Working with women only can leave power relations unchallenged, increase women's workload, and reinforce static definitions of men (e.g. as breadwinners) and women (e.g. as carers). There are potential gains from focusing on men and boys. As Kaufman has suggested[iv], such efforts may (inter alia):

- create a broad social consensus among men and women on issues that previously have been marginalised as only of importance to women;
- mobilise resources and institutions controlled by men, resulting in a net gain in resources available to meet the needs of women and girls;
- isolate those men working to preserve men's power and privilege and to deny rights to women and children;
- contribute to raising the next generation of boys and girls in a framework of gender equality;
- change the attitudes and behaviour of men and boys, and improve the lives of women and girls in the home, workplace, and community.

Effective practice in engaging men in gender equality work

Based on examples of interventions in five fields (reproductive and sexual health; fatherhood; gender-based violence; livelihoods; and work with young men) from a range of countries[v], our forthcoming publication indicates the following elements are critical to effective practice:

1. *Developing a conceptual framework for thinking about men, masculinities and gender relations.* Drawing upon the work of theorists such as Connell, key aspects are: the invisibility of gender issues to most men and the notion of the 'patriarchal dividend' (i.e. the privileges that all men draw upon simply by virtue of being male); the commonalities and differences between men, as well as between men and women; the dominance of specific forms of ('hegemonic'[vi]) masculinity; how masculinities are actively constructed; the costs associated with masculinity for both women and men; and the dynamic nature of masculinities over time.

2. *Positive messages:* In general, it is essential to engage men in gender equality work via positive messages that promote awareness and understanding among them. It is therefore important to use language that resonates with them, avoids attributing blame and encourages positive involvement. However such an approach must not undermine improvements in the position of women and girls, or avoid addressing some men's negative or harmful behaviours.

3. *Effective Messengers:* There are advantages in getting boys or men to engage other boys or men with gender issues (e.g. around men's violence) and of supporting and nurturing such groups. Supportive female voices – including in particular sisters, mothers, grandmothers, wives, and girlfriends – can also be instrumental in encouraging men to change. An important motivator for men is seeing the effects of gender discrimination on women and girls they know.

4. *Engaging with men's emotional and personal lives:* There is a clearly negative impact for men, women and children of men conforming to restrictive definitions of masculinity - dominant images of men needing to present themselves as 'strong, tough, in control, independent'. Attempts to encourage men to engage more actively with their emotional and personal lives are essential, and organisations should create space for men to undertake such exploration. In situations where they feel they will not be treated judgmentally, men are able and willing to open up about personal issues that matter greatly to them. However, the pace of change can be slow and efforts need to be sustained.

5. *Appropriate environment and delivery:* There are venues where and times when men congregate – such as at sports events and religious celebrations, in workplaces, and in social locations such as bars or cafes – and these can be focal points for intervention. There is also value in creating spaces where men can meet away from the 'public gaze'. In a public environment, men are less likely to talk openly and honestly, and are very unlikely to show their vulnerability. The reverse tends to be true in 'private' spaces[vii].

The perspectives and assumptions of staff within health and welfare services are highly relevant too. Tackling these issues requires efforts to make gender visible within welfare services, by providing opportunities for staff to reflect upon the gendered nature of the work and their practice.[viii]

6. *The process of change:* Sometimes personal change in men can come about as a result of a significant life event: becoming a father or grandfather; relationship breakdown; illness; or the death of a loved one. Sometimes it can come through personal realisation of the effects of male power (see 2 above). Gender workshops can also promote change, if logically structured and sequenced over time.

Opportunities to promote change can be closely linked to the context within specific societies. Societal 'crises' (including, for example, the HIV epidemic, large scale unemployment and poverty, and panics about men's violence) can all give rise to shifts and crises in gender relations, providing new opportunities for intervention.

7. *Alliance-building:* Although not widespread, there are examples of men working together for gender justice (e.g. gay activism around HIV/Aids, the White Ribbon Campaign). Men's groups have much to learn from feminist groups; such connections can reduce the risk that men will shore up traditional masculinities, and provide a practical illustration of how men's and women's interests can coincide (e.g. in addressing violence against women).

8. *Monitoring programme effectiveness:* Given the embryonic nature of much work with men, only a few examples of research into the effectiveness of programmes exist (e.g. Programme H in Brasil). Further monitoring is necessary, both to demonstrate whether such work has an impact (and if so, what kind), and to clarify whether devoting resources to it is valuable.

Challenges for Development Organisations

The patriarchal culture common within many development organisations, with men dominating the upper echelons, has tended to obstruct progress [ix]. Contributions to the GEM book suggest that development organisations should:

- review the direction and content of programmes to ensure that the points outlined above are implemented, and that positive initiatives are publicised and shared;
- maintain existing levels of funding for work on gender equality with women, and provide additional funding for work with men;
- ensure that gender equality work takes place with women, men and in mixed-sex groups as appropriate;
- model gender equitable behaviours at institutional policy and project level, and assist staff – especially male staff – to see the connections between the personal and the professional spheres;
- create space for informal, open dialogue on gender issues and sharing about family life and gender relations within and beyond the office;
- develop induction and training in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming;
- train male facilitators to build capacity;

implement working practices such as paternity and maternity leave and flexible working hours, and encourage senior (male managers to act as role models.

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[i] See www.oxfamgb.org for further details

[ii] **Ruxton S** (2002) *Men, Masculinities and Poverty in the UK*, Oxford: Oxfam GB

[iii] **Sweetman C** (1997) *Men and Masculinity*, Focus on Gender paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB; **Chant S, Guttman M** (2000) *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Development*, working paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB; **Sweetman C** (2001) *Men's Involvement in Gender and Development Policy and Practice*, working paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB.

[iv] **Kaufman M** (2003) *The Aim Framework: Addressing and Involving Men and Boys* To Promote Gender Equality and End Gender Discrimination and Violence, UNICEF. Full text on www.michaelkaufman.com/articles . See also **Lang J** (2002) *Gender Is Everyone's Business: Programming with Men to Achieve Gender Equality*, Workshop Report 10-12 June, Oxford: Oxfam GB (available on ww.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/gender/gem/workshop.htm)

[v] Including Brasil, ***Error! Main Document Only.***Canada, the Caribbean, Georgia, India, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa, Timor Leste, UK, and Yemen

[vi] 'Hegemonic masculinity' is a concept that draws upon the ideas of Gramsci. It refers to the dynamic cultural process which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. See **Connell R.** (1995) *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press

[vii] **Lloyd T** (1997) *Let's Get Changed Lads: Developing Work with Boys and Young Men*, London: Working With Men

[viii] **Ruxton S** (2001)'*Men and child welfare services in the UK'*, in **Sweetman C** (ed.), *Beyond Rhetoric: Men's Involvement in Gender and Development Policy and Practice*, Oxfam Working Paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB

[ix] **Chant S, Guttman M** (2000) *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Development*, working paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB. See also **Longwe S** (1995) *'A development agency as a patriarchal cooking pot: the evaporation of policies for women's advancement'*, in **MacDonald M**, *Women's Rights and Development*, Working Paper, Oxfam: Oxford